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VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE IN BOSTON¹

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There is much in our present industrial, social, and democratic environment which emphasizes this function of guidance in the schools. In our present social scheme, among other factors, it is the danger of the omission of the principle which has given the principle no little importance, for in our ills today we are impressed with the necessity of prevention of ailment rather than the curative treatment of it. Specifically illustrated, we no longer wait until a boy has been committed to a penal institution before he is taught a trade, but we teach him a trade, among other reasons, that he may avoid such commitment.

Again, there is the influence of the application of scientific principles to human factors as well as to material processes. The choosing of a vocation by the "trial and error" method seems to be as unprofitable here as elsewhere. There is too much staked on one chance, and there are so few chances to try again. The chances are always against the boy, and success means luck rather than merit.

Personally, I have often felt the need of emphasizing the proper mental attitude on the part of the youth toward his prospective job. Grit and courage, I believe, have more to do with successful adjustment to the job than special aptitude. It must be remembered that special aptitude toward any work is frequently accompanied by painfully evident special inaptitude. The attitude toward the job is always as important as aptitude for the job. Moral attitude has seemed to count more than fortunate mental and physical gifts. What vocational counseling would have advised the youthful Demosthenes to study oratory?

¹ Read at the Annual Meeting of the National Vocational Guidance Association, Richmond, Virginia, December 9, 1914.

Vocations are less plastic than the individuals who pursue them. Individuality in the job was the mark of the handicraft stage; automatic machinery, measured time reactions, and standard products make the job comparatively inflexible. The process of adaptation is in the worker, rather than in the work. Competent vocational guidance must induct young workers into the real world as it is, with all its uncompromising facts. We must not allow our boys and girls to believe that there is any royal road to vocational success, any more than to learning. Some of our present school influences are at wide variance with the main tendencies in our industrial society. The unrestricted elective system in high schools emphasizes aptitude and individuality out of proportion to our industrial structure, wherein co-operation, social subordination, and standardized tasks are basic principles.

The few scientific tests for vocational aptitudes that we now possess give us more of concern than of promise. The vocational counselor wishes to know what a boy can do, more than what he cannot do. Our psychological tests are aptly called eliminative tests. They are more negative than positive; they eliminate but do not evaluate. The practical methods to be at once adopted by vocational counselors are those which are obvious rather than obscure. The school records of pupils, if properly kept and reasonably comprehensive, furnish enough presumptive evidence upon which effective guidance can be tentatively based. Joint conference with the youth and his parents will give the counselor enough additional information upon which to give competent advice, for we must remember that guidance is a different function from placement.

In Boston concrete and definite plans for organized work in vocational guidance are gradually taking shape. Faster progress is prevented chiefly by a lack of funds. Most of our work at present is on a voluntary basis and, while well intentioned and often effective, still lacks the force and achievement which is the result of expert and compensated service. Our present organization for carrying on vocational guidance is as follows: Each elementary school has two teachers assigned to act as official vocational counselors; one of the teachers deals with the pupils leaving to go to work, and the other advises pupils and parents

regarding profitable choice of high-school courses. Each high school has one teacher and sometimes more assigned as counselors, but here counseling is limited chiefly to pupils leaving school to go to work.

Several special schools, such as the Trade School for Girls and the Boston Industrial School for Boys, have provision in their organization for the appointment of special teachers known as vocational assistants, who have definite assignment of duties covering guidance, placement, and follow-up work. In the Trade Schools for Girls vocational assistants have been at work for several years past and what they have been able to achieve furnishes encouragement as to what may be expected as the result of the extension of the kind of service they are giving. Assignment of actual instruction is limited to one period and is for the sole purpose of bringing the vocational assistant and pupil together for more intimate acquaintance. The chief duties of the vocational assistant may be summarized as follows: Visiting the homes of girls who are absent; visiting shops to learn of places; answering calls for employment and placing girls in shops; following up records of girls in shops, assisting in adjustments, and sometimes replacing girls. In addition, these vocational assistants are present at the school one evening a week for conference with working girls who are unable to appear during school hours, and lastly they keep all essential records of the girls, containing information relating to the school, the home, and the shop. Very recently the High School of Commerce has had incorporated into its organization a department head whose chief function is guidance, placement, and follow-up work. A special instructor is assigned to similar duties in the High School of Practical Arts. A general director for vocational guidance has only this year been appointed, but he is primarily an officer in the Continuation School organization, and, consequently, can devote the lesser part of his time to the specific problem of vocational guidance.

Some description of the relation of vocational guidance to continuation schools may profitably be given at this point. When boys and girls under sixteen years of age leave school to go to work, they must secure the necessary working certificate. The process

of securing the certificate involves an interview with the director of vocational guidance. From the school comes a somewhat detailed statement covering not only what is conventionally known as the school record,¹ but, in addition, a detailed account of personal qualities, evident aptitudes or shortcomings, and home conditions. Personal conference enlightened by school information enables the director to give supplementary advice regarding the prospective job and to assign with some basis of presumptive evidence the proper course to pursue in the compulsory continuation school. Guidance and follow-up work are essential features of the Continuation School course, and the teachers of the school are given definite time in their progress to attend to these functions.

The Placement Bureau of Boston comes indirectly into the problem of vocational guidance. This institution is not an official organization of the public schools. It is conducted chiefly by private enterprise although receiving a small subvention in the way of rental from public school funds. The School Committee of Boston has encouraged co-operation with this institution on the part of the schools. Copies of the vocational information cards, mentioned above, are given to the Placement Bureau, which is often instrumental in finding suitable places for boys and girls leaving school. The Placement Bureau has rendered effective service in replacing boys and girls who have left positions for one reason or another. The Boston Chamber of Commerce has aided the Placement Bureau freely by urging employers to resort to the institution in looking for juvenile employees.

During the past few years the attempt has been made to acquaint our voluntary workers in vocational guidance with some of the most important facts and conditions of industry and business. Our vocational counselors everywhere, except in certain special schools mentioned above, serve without additional compensation and also with no exemption from their regular duties. Consequently, no large demands upon their time can reasonably be expected. Business men, store superintendents, and trade experts have, from time to time, made addresses to gatherings of vocational counselors assembled from all over the city at central points.

¹ See accompanying card.

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PUBLIC
(1914) SCHOOLS

PERSONAL RECORD of

First name Initial Last name

School..... Home address..... District..... Suite or floor.....
 Sex..... Color..... Date of birth..... Birthplace..... Years in U.S.....
 Father's name..... Occupation..... Business address.....
 Mother's name..... Occupation..... Business address.....
 If either parent is not living so indicate by placing # before the parent's name
 Date of this record..... Date of leaving school..... Grade on leaving..... Teacher's name.....

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS: Weight..... Height..... Neatness.....

Special physical defects.....
 Remarks.....

SCHOOL RECORD: Conduct..... Times present..... Times absent..... Cause of absence..... Times tardy.....
 Arithmetic..... English..... Geography..... Reading..... History..... Grammar..... Music..... Spelling.....
 Drawing..... Manual training..... Sewing..... Cooking..... Penmanship..... Science..... Physical training..... Physiology.....

HIGH SCHOOL SUBJECTS: Course..... Foreign language..... Mathematics..... Science..... Clerical Arts..... Domestic Arts.....
 English..... History..... Special talents.....

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS: Reliable..... Industrious..... Obedient..... Cheerful..... Courteous..... Has pupil initiative?.....
 Remarks.....

Has pupil indicated any interest which should assist in the selection of an occupation?.....
 If so, what interest?..... What occupation?.....
 Do you as {Teacher
 Vocational Counselor} think this interest should be encouraged?..... Parents' reference for child's work?.....

Previous work record.....
 Is the aid of the Placement Bureau desired?.....
 Remarks.....

More benefit has resulted from contact with special private institutions like the Vocation Bureau and the Girls' Trade Education League. The bulletins and monographs of those two organizations have been of value in furnishing the specific information about industry and business together with wages and working conditions prevailing therein, which the counselors need to know. We have been fortunate in Boston in enjoying close association with the Vocational Bureau which has been a central point of organization and information upon vocational guidance for the whole country. We owe today our vision of the possibilities and appreciation of the need of vocational guidance to the Vocation Bureau.

During the current year we are trying a different method from the lecture system in acquainting our counselors with the problems and duties of guidance. We are carrying on a series of locality conferences under the charge of the director at which discussions take place concerning the way to solve problems as they originate in the schools. The attempt is thus being made to organize the experience of the members of local groups who usually are confronted with conditions rendered more or less uniform by reason of similar prevailing social and economic circumstances. As stated before, the present problems of vocational guidance are more obvious than obscure, but organizing the obvious is not an involuntary, automatic process, but requires specific and careful attention and needs completion before more developed and complex procedure may be undertaken.

The functions of vocational guidance should be more extensive than usually conceived at the present time; in fact, vocational guidance, in its limited sense, cannot be fully effective unless supplemented by personal, moral, and social guidance. Unless the scope of guidance is broadened we may be in danger of having its functions looked upon as a sort of sublimated fortune-telling or palm-reading. We feel the need in the schools, as never before, of knowing more of the home environment and limiting circumstances of the boys and girls in our schools. But the schools at present lack organization and the means of assuming effectively larger burdens. Quite recently one large high school in Boston has accepted the assistance of the social workers of several settle-

ment houses in investigating cases of school delinquency and irregularities. These school visitors have been asked to go into the home to confer with parents about failure in school work, about irregular attendance, and about marked infractions of school discipline. The results have proven of great service to the teachers of the school and to the parents of the children. The teachers, more often than not, have seen that they have misunderstood the causes of failure to respond to accepted classroom standards, that what was supposed to be a moral lack was in reality something very different and quite condonable when the real reasons had been secured. The parents, as well, have been led to see that the school is something more than an unsympathetic institution making demands for conformity with regulations more legal than human.

The vocational counselor, or perhaps we should say the school counselor, may properly conceive her duties as embracing quite prominently the functions indicated immediately preceding. She should know the child in the school, in the home, and in the workshop, and should be a source of guidance to the teacher in the classroom, to the parents in the home, and to the child in his several relations in the home, the school, and the workshop.

It is quite natural that it should be assumed that there is a place in many schools, both elementary and secondary, in our large cities for one or more trained teachers possessing both sympathy and capacity for the problems of the counselor. The principle that vocational schools need this special service is already admitted in Boston and elsewhere. It will be illogical to deny that general schools need similar special service, for the motive today of our secondary schools is largely vocational. A large number of our boys and girls are unable to find places in our special vocational schools and resort to the general schools where they pursue special courses which promise to offer some of the advantages of the special school. A current study into the state of commercial education in our Boston high schools reveals the fact that from 50 to 90 per cent of our pupils are enrolled in commercial courses. This means that there are in this single field thousands of boys and girls in our own school system who need the special service of guidance, placement, and follow-up work. Our boys and girls are

receiving this attention in part and as much as is reasonably possible under the limitations of the time and energy of the regular teachers, but the shortcomings of our present achievements simply emphasize the need of additional and more expert assistance if the sound, sensible, and long-cherished aim of our schools is to be better realized in our day and generation.

An able and influential monthly magazine contains in the current issue a bitter and brilliant indictment of our American school system, comparing it disadvantageously to the systems of Sweden and Norway, with their agricultural and technical folk schools. "We are content," our critic says, "to hang the alphabet and multiplication table around the child's neck and then send the poor thing out to educate itself."

The awakening of the people and the teachers of this country to the need of vocational education, vocational guidance, varied and specific educational opportunities of a great variety constitutes the best answer to the above taunt. We have not as a nation failed to hold a noble aim for education, but many will agree that we need to proceed energetically toward the adoption and extension of more effective methods of attaining our aim.